

Guiding Principles for the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel

Purpose of the Examination

“In order to significantly improve pupil achievement in high school and to ensure that pupils who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics, the state must set higher standards for high school graduation.” (Senate Bill 2, Ch. 1, Statutes of 1999).

The Examination

1. The examination must be aligned to the *California English-Language Arts Content Standards* and the *California Mathematics Content Standards* at a grade level or levels; the *Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks* and the *Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks*. The High School Exit Examination (HSEE) Panel may recommend which of these standards are best suited as the basis for the examination design—that is, not all of the possible California content standards need to be used. Careful documentation of which standards are the basis of the examination and the match of the specific California content standard and specific examination item must be clear.
2. The examination must be criterion referenced in nature, with the California content standards as the guiding criteria.
3. The examination must give a credible and reliable score for individual students and have discrimination sensitivity around the possible “cut score” range of student performance.
4. (Not yet approved by the panel.) The examination must be rigorous and challenging and must allow for increasing the passing levels on the examination over time. We have set the level of difficulty somewhat below our final expectations in order to allow for a phase-in period. Over time, the examination should become more rigorous to meet the increasing demands on high school graduates. We will set a timetable of expectations for this increase in rigor.
5. The examination must include both multiple-choice and performance items in both the language arts and mathematics content tests as suitable for the specific standards that the items are intended to test. It must be in a format similar to that of other California tests, so that teachers, students, and the public are familiar with it.

6. The performance items must be able to be scored in a consistent, cost-effective, and timely manner—a turn-around time of eight weeks must be met, but students must also have flexibility in using successfully-completed parts of the test in their finals scores. Note: Section from the High school Exit Examination legislation referring to passing parts of the examination:

Education Code Section 60851 (d) states: “The results of the exit examination shall be provided to each pupil taking the examination within eight weeks of the examination administration and in time for the pupil to take any section of the examination not passed at the next administration. A pupil shall take again only those parts of the examination he or she has not previously passed and may not retake any portion of the exam that he or she has previously passed.”

7. The examination must be linguistically sensitive and reflect full consideration of California’s diverse population and provide districts with appropriate accommodations for special needs students. Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to special needs students:

- Education Code Section 60850 (e) (2): “The examination, regardless of federal financial participation, shall comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 2000d et seq.), its implementing regulations (34 C.F.R. Part 100), and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1701).”
- Education Code Section 60850 (g): “The examination shall be offered to individuals with exceptional needs, as defined in Section 56026, in accordance with paragraph (17) of subsection (a) of Section 1412 of Title 20 of the United States Code and Section 794 and following of Title 29 of the United States Code. Individuals with exceptional needs shall be administered the examination with appropriate accommodations, where necessary.”
- Education Code Section 60852: “Notwithstanding Section 60851, if a school district determines that a pupil does not possess sufficient English language skills to be assessed pursuant to Section 60850, the district may defer the requirement that the pupil pass the high school exit examination for a period of up to 24 calendar months of enrollment in the California public school system until the pupil has completed six months of instruction in reading, writing, and comprehension in the English language. Nothing in this section shall be construed to allow any pupil to receive a diploma of graduation from high school without passing the exit examination, in English, prescribed by Section 60850.”

Alternatives must be considered for low performing students. Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to special needs students:

- Education Code Section 60853 (a): “In order to prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination, a school district shall use regularly available resources and any available supplemental remedial resources, including, but not limited to, funds available for programs established by Chapter 320 of the Statutes of 1998, Chapter 811 of the Statutes of 1997, Chapter 743 of the Statutes of 1998, and funds available for other similar supplemental remedial programs.
(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that a school district consider restructuring its academic offerings reducing the electives available to any pupil who has not demonstrated the skills necessary to succeed on the exit examination, so that the pupil can be provided supplemental instruction during the regularly scheduled academic year.
(c) A school district should prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination. In preparing pupils to succeed, school districts are encouraged to use existing resources to ensure that all pupils succeed. The state has created programs such as the Class Size Reduction Program, staff development programs,

after school programs, and others, in addition to providing general purpose funding, in order to assist school districts in providing an education that will help all pupils succeed.”

Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to alternatives:

- Education Code Section 60856: “After adoption and the initial administrations of the high school exit examination the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, shall study the appropriateness of other criteria by which high school pupils who are regarded as highly proficient but unable to pass the high school exit examination may demonstrate their competency and receive a high school diploma. This criteria shall include, but is not limited to, an exemplary academic record as evidenced by transcripts and alternative tests of equal rigor in the academic areas covered by the high school exit examination. If the State Board of Education determines that other criteria are appropriate and do not undermine the intent of this chapter that all high school graduates demonstrate satisfactory academic proficiency, the board shall forward its recommendations to the Legislature for enactment.”

Curricular Validity of the Examination/Connection to Instruction

8. The curricular and instructional validity of the examination questions must be clearly demonstrated in a process to be designed by the HSEE panel. The intent is to have an examination that reflects a demanding yet feasible “opportunity to learn” environment for students in the future.
9. To the extent possible, the examination must be connected to, and enhance, specific curriculum/course offerings in schools and support any of several approaches (such as integrated math or the algebra/geometry sequence).
10. The examination must provide useful, user-friendly results to schools, parents, and students that will improve the quality of teaching and learning.
11. The examination must enhance the proposed instructional focus on helping all students succeed on the examination.

The Policy/Political Context for the Examination

12. The examination must have credibility with educators and the public. . It must be possible to have a large item bank that can be used to support multiple testing opportunities per year. The tests developer must develop a sample test to be distributed prior to the administration of the first tests. The California Department of Education, school districts and county offices of education must invest time and effort in explaining the purposes and expectations of the examination to educators (including post-secondary), students, parents, and the public and must ensure articulation of educational programs between kindergarten and grade eight and the high schools.
13. The examination needs to be capable of withstanding a variety of possible legal challenges.

14. To the extent possible, the examination support an integrated and useful assessment system in California, kindergarten through college.
15. Students should be provided alternatives for demonstrating their ability to meet English-language arts and mathematics content standards at a designated level of performance on other examinations.
16. The examination must be seen as one necessary requirement among others for graduation. This connection needs policy coherence and full communication.
17. The real and potential consequences of the examination need to be carefully considered, including the administrative and fiscal impact on California's schools.

Development Process for the Examination

18. Serious consideration should be given to modifying an existing test for use as the high school exit examination and/or to developing the examination using items from other test(s) that are aligned with California's English-language arts and mathematics content standards.
19. Exit examinations developed by other states and countries should be reviewed by the panel prior to the selection of content for the California examination.
20. The exit panel will attempt to reach consensus on goals whenever possible.
21. Educators and other stakeholders, including the HSEE Panel, must be involved in the construction and review of examination items.